Western University
Local Government Program
Research Design and Methods in Public Administration
Public Administration 9914
Fall 2016

Instructor: Dr. Zack Taylor
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Office Hours: Fridays, 1–2pm, or by appointment

Dates: Fridays 3–7pm, Saturdays 9am–4pm
Sept. 23–24, Oct. 28–29, Nov. 25–26
Location: SSC 4255

COURSE DESCRIPTION AND LEARNING OBJECTIVES
Public administrators in local government produce "research" all the time. They routinely evaluate the effectiveness of public policies and processes, learn about experiences of policy client groups, and compare performance across jurisdictions. They also consume research by consultants, other public administrators, and academics. This is an intensive crash course on the process of conducting and presenting original research on public administration and policy. The emphasis is on practical applications and skills development.

Full- and part-time MPA students come from a variety of backgrounds and possess a diverse range of skills and experience. This course will provide everyone with a common structure and vocabulary as you continue with other course work and undertake your MRP. As you plan your Major Research Paper, you are encouraged to build on the foundation provided by this course by seeking additional advice and assistance from faculty who are specialists in particular approaches. The course content is also transferrable to other class assignments and your professional work, and you will also be able to use it to critically interpret and evaluate academic and professional research products.

SCHEDULE OF TOPICS AND ASSIGNMENTS

Date	Time	Topic
Module 1		**Getting started**
09/23	3–5:30pm	Introduce ourselves and MRP ideas
		Discuss goals and objectives of the course and MRPs
		What are typical goals of PA research?
Module 2		**Developing a grounded research question**
09/23 (cont'd)	5:30–7pm	How do you know you have a good research question?
		Exercise: Brainstorm and critique research question ideas
09/24	9–10am	What is already known? Making a literature review
Module 3		**Answering your question: Research design**
09/24 (cont'd)	10am–3:30pm (lunch in middle)	**What is research design?**
		Operationalizing your question
		Overview of common PA research designs
		Case selection / sampling
		Overview of common information types and sources
		Planning your research project: A shopping list approach
	3:30–4pm	Introduce assignments
Module 4		**Methods: Collecting data from human subjects**
10/28	3–3:30pm	**Review:** Connecting your design to the question
	3:30–7pm	**Interviews:** Who and how many subjects?
		Structured vs. open-ended format
		Using and interpreting open-ended interview responses
		Exercise: Coding techniques for content analysis (Using Excel)
10/29	9am–2pm (lunch in middle)	**Surveys:** Who and how many respondents?
		Questionnaire design: Scales, open-ended questions, branching
		Fielding your survey: Paper, phone, or internet? (Demonstration using Google Forms)
		Exercise: Using PivotTables to summarize survey responses (Using Excel)
	2pm–4pm	**Ethical considerations** for research involving human subjects
		Navigating the university ethics review process

Module 5		Methods: Collecting and interpreting quantitative data
11/25	3–5pm	Finding and using public data *Exercise:* Processing and mapping open data (Using Google FusionTables)
	5–7pm	Using descriptive statistics to understand your data: mean, median, standard deviation (Using Excel) *Exercise:* Presenting survey responses in tables
11/26	9am–1:30pm (lunch in middle)	Using variation and regression analysis to investigate significance, correlation, and causation (Using Excel) *Exercise:* Analysis of municipal performance indicators
	1:30–2:30pm	Using graphs to interpret and represent your data: What types and when? (Using Excel) *Exercise:* Graph interpretation
Module 6		**Writing it up**
11/26 (cont'd)	2:30–4pm	Good practices for paper organization, formatting, citation, and bibliography (Using Word)

Time ranges are approximate.
Ten-minute breaks will occur every 60–90 minutes.
Lunch is 45 minutes.

COURSE WEBSITE

This course makes use of OWL. Please refer to the course website regularly for announcements and course information: https://owl.uwo.ca/portal.

COURSE MATERIALS

We will use a textbook that can be purchased at the campus bookstore or from on-line retailers:

> van Thiel, Sandra. 2014. *Research Methods in Public Administration and Public Management: An Introduction*. London: Routledge.

While the book is unfortunately expensive, you will be able to sell it back to the bookstore in December.

In addition, the instructor will distribute handouts and other materials that include how-to guides for particular procedures. Demonstration datasets will be posted on OWL.

TECHNOLOGY REQUIREMENTS

In addition, we will undertake a number of in-class exercises that require the use of a computer. All students are asked to bring to class a laptop computer with the following software installed:

- **Microsoft Excel.** For consistency of experience, version 2016 is preferred. Excel should also have the Analysis ToolPak add-in installed. For more information on the Analysis ToolPak, see: https://support.office.com/en-us/article/Load-the-Analysis-ToolPak-305C260E-224F-4739-9777-2D86F1A5BD89
- **Microsoft Word.** For consistency of experience, version 2016 is preferred.
- **A web browser.** We will access data from websites and use browser-based open-access software packages, including Google FusionTables and Google Forms.

Open-source and commercially available alternatives to Microsoft Office possess many of the same features, however for the purposes of this course, Word and Excel will be used to demonstrate concepts and methods. Note that Western graduate students are entitled to a free installation of Microsoft Office 2016 (Windows or Mac). See: http://www.uwo.ca/its/sitelicense/microsoft/homeuse.html

If you are unable to meet these requirements, please let the instructor know as soon as possible before the class begins so that we can make alternative arrangements.

EVALUATION

Annotated bibliography (15%). An annotated bibliography is an important research tool and a building block of a literature review. This will exercise your library research and critical reading skills.

- You will submit your annotated bibliography, by midnight on Thursday, Oct. 20.

MRP research proposal (40%). This will include a research question and description of a research design. While you will not be held to this proposal as you move forward with your MRP, it is an opportunity to systematically think through the research process and your project.

- You will submit your draft research proposal for peer review by midnight on Thursday, Nov. 17.
- You will submit your final proposal, with a short description of what you learned from the review, by midnight on Friday, Dec. 2.

Peer review of the research proposal (10%). A draft of each student's research proposal will be <u>anonymously</u> reviewed by at least one peer. The review will take the form of a brief commentary on the most and least successful or persuasive aspects of the proposal and propose one substantive improvement.

- You will receive a draft proposal to review on Friday, Nov. 18.
- The review must be completed by midnight on Friday, Nov. 25.

On-line tests (25%). After the completion of Modules 3, 4, and 5, you will also complete short on-line tests designed to evaluate your understanding of core concepts. The tests are to be done on your own time on the OWL platform. Tests must be completed by midnight on:

- Module 3: Tuesday, Sept. 27 (5%)
- Module 4: Tuesday, Nov. 1 (10%)
- Module 5: Tuesday, Nov. 29 (10%)

Participation (10%). Finally, you be evaluated on your active and constructive contribution to class discussion and group exercises.

COURSE POLICIES

E-mail policy: All Western University students are required to have an @uwo.ca e-mail account. The instructor will *only* respond to e-mails sent from a Western University account, that clearly identify the sender, and have "PA9914" in the subject line. The instructor will ***not*** accept assignments by e-mail.

Late assignments: The penalty for late assignments is two percentage points per day (including weekend days). A grade of 80% on an assignment therefore becomes 72% in four days. Assignments more than 10 days late will not be accepted. Extensions due to illness require a medical certificate. If you foresee problems meeting submission deadlines please consult the instructor early; accommodations can always be made with adequate advance notice. This means

at least one week before the deadline, not the night before the work is due! The last day for submission of term assignments is XXXX, after which they cannot be accepted.

Academic integrity: Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following Web site:
http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/appeals/scholastic_discipline_grad.pdf

ASSISTANCE
If you are having trouble with the course material or are falling behind in your work, please contact the course instructor as soon as possible. We can only help you if the lines of communication are open.

Help with writing: Learning to express ideas clearly is a central goal of the university experience. If academic writing does not come easily to you, you are strongly encouraged to make use of the Writing Support Centre: http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/writing/.

Accommodations on medical grounds: Students seeking academic accommodation on medical grounds for any missed tests, exams, participation components and/or assignments must apply to the Academic Counseling office of their home Faculty and provide documentation. Academic accommodation cannot be granted by the instructor or department. Please refer to the Policy on Accommodation for Medical Illness https://studentservices.uwo.ca/secure/index.cfm and download a Student Medical Certificate (SMC): https://studentservices.uwo.ca/ under the Medical Documentation heading. Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health@Western http://www.health.uwo.ca/mental_health/ for a complete list of options about how to obtain help*.*

Accommodations on religious grounds: Every effort has been made to avoid scheduling assignment due dates on religious holidays. Please inform the instructor at the beginning of the course if you will be unable to attend class for reason of religious observance.

READING SCHEDULE

In addition to these textbook readings, the instructor will distribute handouts and other materials before or in class. Please complete the readings before the start of class.

Module 1	**Getting started**

Chapter 1, "Research in Public Administration."

Module 2	**Developing a grounded research question**

Chapter 2, "The research problem."

Chapter 3, "Theoretical framework."

Module 3	**Answering your question: Research design**

Chapter 5, "Research design."

Chapter 4, "Operationalization."

Chapter 8, "The case study," beginning of chapter to the end of section 8.3.

Module 4	**Methods: Collecting data from human subjects**

Interviews and surveys

Chapter 8, "The case study," section 8.4 to the end of the chapter (on interviewing).

Chapter 7, "The survey."

Chapter 11, "Analyzing qualitative data."

Research ethics

Chapter 12, "Reporting Results," pp. 154–155 (on research ethics).

UWO Research ethics guidelines for LGP MRPs

Module 5	**Methods: Collecting and interpreting quantitative data**

Chapter 10, "Analyzing quantitative data."

Module 6	**Writing it up**

Chapter 12, "Reporting results."